



Natural Health Practitioners of Canada
Praticiens de la Santé Naturelle du Canada

RETURN-TO-WORK PROTOCOLS

Handbook for Members

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has had immeasurable effects on the professional and personal lives of holistic practitioners across Canada. As provincial governments and territories implement back-to-work plans, the Natural Health Practitioners of Canada (NHPC) is helping members safely navigate re-opening their practices.

This document contains guidelines and best practices to help you manage your practice during the COVID-19 health crisis. These guidelines are **recommended** to keep your practice safe for all who enter and work there, but it is **not mandatory** that you follow them. Massage therapists practice in a wide variety of settings, and safety measures that may be critical in one setting may not be applicable in another. Practitioners are expected to think critically, apply their own professional judgment, and be guided by their professional responsibility to create an environment conducive to health and safety.

It is mandatory that all practitioners abide by local government regulations for safe working practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. Those protocols are in place to help stop the spread of the virus and protect vulnerable Canadians. All provinces and territories have specific orders, and you should use the guidelines in this handbook only after your local government has lifted the ban on non-essential business operation.

Once operation bans are lifted, return to work **only** when you feel it is safe to do so. Do not rush yourself. You are not obligated to start working again until you feel safe, well-equipped, and confident to practice.

As the COVID-19 health crisis evolves, the NHPC will make changes to this resource as needed. As always, if you have questions or concerns please contact the NHPC office by phone at 1-888-711-7701 or by email at growingtogether@nhpcanada.org.

Booking Appointments and Screening Clients

As a practitioner, it is your duty to ensure your practice space is safe for yourself and your clients. The best way to remain safe and healthy is not to let anyone who is sick, who has recently travelled, or who has been in contact with someone with COVID-19 into your clinic.

COVID-19 symptoms are similar to influenza and other respiratory illnesses. Before booking an appointment with a client, go through a screening process with them.

Over the phone or through email ask your clients the following questions:

- Are you experiencing any of the following **primary COVID-19 symptoms**, even mildly?
 - fever
 - a new cough or a chronic cough that is worsening
 - shortness of breath that is new or worsening
 - difficulty breathing
 - sore throat
 - runny or stuffy nose
- Are you experiencing any of the following **secondary COVID-19 symptoms**, even mildly?
 - painful swallowing
 - headache
 - chills
 - muscle or joint pain
 - general feeling of unwell, new fatigue, or severe exhaustion
 - gastrointestinal symptoms (nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or unexplained loss of appetite)
 - loss of sense of smell or taste
 - conjunctivitis (commonly known as pink eye)
- Have you been in contact with anyone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19?
- Have you travelled outside of Canada in the last 14 days?
- Have you been in contact with anyone who has travelled outside of Canada in the last 14 days?
- Does your job require you to wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)?

All practitioners should implement the following protocols when working and treating clients:

- Do not treat clients who are ill, who have travelled within the last 14 days, or who have been in contact with someone who has COVID-19.
- Leave more time between clients (e.g. 30 minutes) to allow for proper cleaning.

- Clients should arrive no more than five minutes before their scheduled appointment time to avoid congestion in waiting areas. Let clients know this when they book their treatment.
- Waiting areas should be set up to allow for physical distancing. Signs should be posted to remind people of physical-distancing rules.
- Remove high-touch items, like magazines, toys, and water-coolers.
- Do not offer beverages.

Before re-opening your practice, also consider the following questions and how your clinic will manage the decisions you make:

- Are there alternatives to having clients wait in your clinic for their appointment to start? For example, can you ask clients to wait in their vehicles until you text or call them that their appointments are ready?
- Can you add the above screening questions to your online booking platform?
- Are you equipped to treat clients who work in front-line health care? Consider the environment you operate in and the risk these clients could pose to everyone involved in your practice.

Standard Infection and Prevention Control Measures

Each province and territory in Canada will have its own return-to-work requirements for practitioners. **You are responsible for complying with your provincial/territorial government's back-to-work requirements.** The liability insurance coverage provided by the NHPC requires that, at a minimum, practitioners must comply with the orders specified by their local government.

COVID-19 is spread through contact with respiratory droplets, either from a cough or sneeze or from contact with contaminated surfaces where droplets have fallen. Before returning to work, it is important to know the [facts about COVID-19](#) provided by Health Canada.

To help prevent the spread of COVID-19, you must do the following in your regular practice:

- develop infection prevention and control policies and procedures specific to your practice
- meet infection control guidelines for hand hygiene, environmental cleaning and disinfection, and use of personal protective equipment (PPE) required by your local provincial/territorial government.
- provide infection prevention and control training to all staff

HAND HYGIENE

Proper handwashing is the most effective way to stop the spread of COVID-19 and other infections. Post a handwashing poster near all sinks in your practice.

Diligently practise these handwashing protocols:

- Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds using an adequate amount of soap.
- Rub hands together to create friction, rinse under warm running water, and dry them with single-use towels.
- Turn off the tap with single-use towel.
- When hands are not visibly soiled, you may use an appropriate alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol and approved by Health Canada.
- Handwashing stations or hand sanitizers should be available inside the clinic environment, treatment room, and reception area.

The above handwashing protocols should be used by all staff in the following situations:

- upon entering and exiting the practice environment
- before and after providing direct care
- after handling dirty laundry
- before and after putting on and taking off personal protective equipment
- after cleaning client contact surfaces
- upon completion of any touch-based administrative tasks (e.g. payment transactions)

Remind clients to wash their hands or use hand sanitizer when entering and exiting the practice environment.

ENVIRONMENTAL CLEANING AND DISINFECTION

The COVID-19 virus can survive for several days on different surfaces and objects. Reduce touchpoints in your workplace and clean and disinfect surfaces frequently to prevent spread of the disease:

- Remove all items that cannot be easily cleaned, such as magazines, toys, and water coolers, from the treatment room or reception area.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and equipment after contact, even when they are not visibly soiled. This includes reception desks, counters, telephones, PIN pads, tablets, computers, pens, shelves, door handles, light switches, lubricant dispensers, treatment tools and equipment, exercise equipment, etc.
- Frequently clean and disinfect shared facilities such as washrooms, staff rooms, laundry rooms, and elevators.
- If possible, employees or contractors should use their own products. If they share product bottles, the bottles should be cleaned and disinfected between each use.

- Launder linens and other items that come into contact with clients between each use.
- Launder and thoroughly dry clothing and fabric items on the highest temperature setting possible.

Employers should provide a safe and hygienic work environment by ensuring the workplace is well-stocked with items such as tissues, no-touch trash receptacles, hand soap, alcohol-based hand sanitizers, disinfectants, and disposable towels.

Cleaning vs. Disinfection

There is a difference between cleaning products and disinfectants. Ensure you use each product correctly for effective sanitization:

- Cleaning products are designed to remove particles, such as dust and dirt, and oils from surfaces, but they do not kill germs.
- Disinfectants kill germs and should only be applied to clean surfaces. Disinfectant wipes are not effective on heavily soiled surfaces.
- Clean surfaces first with a cleaner, then apply a disinfectant to kill germs.
- Always follow product guidelines for both cleaners and disinfectants to ensure your own safety and effective cleaning and disinfecting.
- Use only disinfectants that have a Drug Identification Number (DIN), an 8-digit number given by Health Canada to [approved hard-surface disinfectants](#).
- Common disinfectants include bleach solutions (one part bleach to nine parts water), quaternary ammonium (QUAT), alcohol (70%), and peroxide.
- Vinegar, tea tree oil, etc. are not effective disinfectants against COVID-19.

Refer to the following websites for further best practices in infection control and prevention:

[Infection Control for Regulated Professionals](#)

[Corona Virus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) Cleaning and Disinfection for Public Spaces](#)

[Good Hygiene Practices – Reducing the Spread of Infections and Viruses](#)

[Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces during COVID-19](#)

[Coronavirus Disease \(COVID-19\): Being Prepared](#)

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

Holistic health practitioners whose practice requires them to come into close contact (less than two metres) with people need to take extra precautions, such as client screening and wearing personal protective equipment (PPE). The NHPC has compiled [a list of PPE suppliers](#) (under the question *Where can I find personal protective equipment (PPE)?*). The use of PPE is recommended for your safety, but is not mandatory unless your provincial/territorial government requires you to use it.

Face protection can provide a barrier to protect a practitioner's eyes, nose, and mouth from coming into contact with body fluids expelled when a client coughs or sneezes. If you are working directly with clients, you should consider wearing PPE, including a procedural/surgical mask, eye protection, and an apron to protect clothes.

Your workplace should have protocols in place for [safely putting on, removing, and disposing of personal protective equipment](#).

The information below is extensive and may not be relevant to your practice. It is up to you as a practitioner to decide if you are going to implement PPE measures that go above what is mandated by your provincial/territorial government.

Procedural/Surgical Masks and Eye Protection

Procedural/surgical masks reduce the risk of splashes, droplets, saliva or spit from contaminating the skin and mucous membranes of the wearer's nose and mouth.

The NHPC recommends that you wear a procedural/surgical mask instead of a non-medical mask. Non-medical face masks do not provide as much protection from virus particles because they may not fit properly or may not be made of appropriate materials.

Eye protection may also be worn, as it provides another layer of safety. This can include safety glasses, goggles, or face shields and may be sourced from a hardware or medical supply store. Prescription eyeglasses alone do not provide sufficient protection from COVID-19.

If you choose to implement these measures, put on your mask and eye protection before your client arrives and ensure both fit properly. Masks and eye protection must be changed or cleaned and sanitized when they become soiled or moist.

You may also ask clients to wear a face mask during treatment, or it may be required by your local government. Inform clients of this protocol before they arrive at their appointment. If a client is uncomfortable wearing a mask during treatment in a prone position, consider using side-lying positioning instead. It is important to conduct your own risk assessment when dealing with PPE.

To [properly wear a mask](#):

- wash your hands before putting on and immediately after taking off the mask
- ensure a snug fit over the nose and under the chin
- wear the mask with the moisture-absorbing side against the skin
- change the mask when it is moist or soiled
- only touch the elastic or ties when removing the mask
- do not wear the mask around the neck
- discard single-use masks in a waste container

Aprons

Aprons may help protect practitioners' clothes from contamination when providing treatments. Aprons can be either cloth or a plastic; cloth aprons should be changed between clients and laundered on the hottest setting possible, while plastic aprons should be cleaned and disinfected between clients. If you are using single-use aprons, properly dispose of them between each client.

Gloves

Single-use disposable gloves are not required during treatment, as long as appropriate handwashing protocols are used. However, individual practitioners and clients may prefer that the practitioner wear gloves during the treatment session as an extra safety measure.

If you choose to wear gloves while practising, you must continue to follow handwashing protocols. You must also follow these glove-wearing protocols:

- Wash your hands properly before you put on gloves and after you remove them.
- Remove and replace your gloves when they become heavily soiled, when working between clients, and when switching between dirty and clean tasks.
- Remove gloves carefully, using only glove-to-glove or skin-to-skin technique to prevent contaminating your hands.

Gloves are part of routine precautions and can be worn as a safeguard against exposure to blood, body fluids, secretions, excretions, and mucous membranes. You should wear gloves when:

- cleaning contaminated items and linens
- performing routine environmental cleaning in your clinic
- handling waste
- a health alert requires you to wear them

Guidelines for Providing Mobile Holistic Health Services

The COVID-19 health pandemic poses unique risks for practitioners who provide in-home care to clients, particularly because the practitioner does not have control of the work environment.

For the most part, the safety requirements for working in a client's home are the same as those followed when working in a clinic setting. The following guidelines are intended to help mobile practitioners manage their practice during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Please check the [NHPC COVID-19 Q&A](#) frequently for information, updates, and government bulletins about safe working practices.

Screening of Practitioners, Clients, and Other Household Members

- You must self-screen for COVID-19 symptoms and reschedule appointments if you are feeling ill or exhibiting symptoms, even mildly.
- Clients must complete the COVID-19 waiver before their appointment, either online or by email.
- The client and all people living in the client's home must be screened for symptoms of COVID-19 **before** you enter the home.
- If a client or members of their household have symptoms, reschedule their appointment and recommend they contact their provincial public health authority for further direction.
- If no symptoms are reported from either the client or any household members, put on appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) before entering the client's home.
- Before beginning treatment, perform a risk assessment of the treatment area to ensure it is safe to work in.

Practitioner and Client Hygiene

- Cough/Sneeze etiquette – follow clinic procedures
- Hand Hygiene – follow clinic procedures

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- You must, at a minimum, follow provincial guidelines about wearing PPE. The NHPC recommends that you wear a procedural/surgical face mask during treatment to protect the client from potential transmission of the virus.
- Clients should wear a face mask to protect you. A non-medical mask is acceptable and may be provided by either you or the client.
- You may need to educate clients on how to put on and remove PPE properly to prevent contamination.
- If a client has a medical reason for not wearing a mask or if they are uncomfortable wearing a mask in prone position, you may decide that a mask is not required or that it can be removed while the client is in a prone position.
- Ask clients to place a small garbage can by their main entry door so you can dispose of PPE safely. If the client does not provide a garbage can by their entry door, you should remove your face mask at your vehicle and place it in a garbage bag.

- You should change work clothes before travelling directly to another client's home or consider wearing an apron or other covering while in a client's home to prevent contamination of clothing between clients. If you wear a plastic/vinyl apron, you must clean and disinfect it between clients.

Environmental Cleaning and Disinfection

- Use cleaning and disinfecting products approved by Health Canada.
- Clean and disinfect all surfaces in the client's home that you may have touched.
- Secure used sheets/linens in a closed bag or container with a lid before placing them in your vehicle.
- Consider wearing shoe covers in the client's home.
- All equipment (e.g. treatment table or chair) that you bring into the client's home must be cleaned and disinfected between clients.
- Bring items such as tissues, hand soap, hand sanitizers, disinfectants, and disposable towels to ensure a hygienic work environment.

Physical Distancing

- Family members should maintain a physical distance of two metres from the treatment area during the visit.

Other Considerations

- Inform clients about the enhanced safety measures you are implementing before their appointment.
- If you are increasing your fees to cover increased expenses, inform clients of the price increase when they make their appointment.
- Have clients complete the health history/intake form and any other paperwork electronically before their appointment.
- Document all precautions taken during each treatment, including (but not limited to) COVID-19 symptom screening results, all PPE used, any modifications made during the treatment due to mask use, and the cleaning and disinfection protocols followed before and after the treatment began.